

On Creativity

By
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What is creativity? It is hard for us to define it concisely. Any definition of it should include the essential element of novelty. During the creative act, people manipulate external objects and symbols to produce a notable event unusual to them and the environment.

People confuse creativity with verbal skills and quickness of mind. These attributes are pointers to creativity rather than creativity itself.

We may consider creativity according to the people who create, their attitudes, habits, and values. We may explain it by showing the way of the mental processes by which creativity comes into play. We may understand it in terms of its products: theories, inventions, poems, paintings, etc. Finally, we may analyze creativity in the light of the environmental and cultural influences.

Premier creativity shatters the dark clouds of custom and extends the possibilities of thought and perception. Creativity, to a large extent, springs from the re-arrangement of existing knowledge, a re-arrangement that is itself an addition to knowledge.

The high price of originality is the cruel hostility of one's conservative, conformist contemporaries. The Church denounced the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) and the Italian physicist Galileo (1564-1642) as blasphemers. The Roman (Catholic) Inquisition burned the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) as an immoral heretic. The English scientist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) earned the wrath of the clergy. Traditional institutions condemned the British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) because of his

unconventional opinions. All of them suffered because they had something new to offer.

Originality alone does not make an act or an idea creative. Relevance is an essential factor. The creative act is a response to a particular challenge. It must solve, or clarify, the situation that has caused it to arise. An idea is creative not only because it is original, but also because it achieves something appropriate to a situation.

Creative thinking is innovative, exploratory and venturesome. It is impatient of conventions. Nothing creative is cautious, methodical and conservative. Creativity absorbs the new into the already known and expands the existing categories. Creative thought is iconoclastic; the non-creative opinion is dogmatic. In the words of the Irish dramatist George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), "Some men see things as they are, any day, why?! I dream of things that never were and say, why not?!"

Creativity involves certain mental abilities, such as the ability to change one's approach to a problem, to produce extraordinary and uncommon ideas, and to see beyond the immediate situation and redefine issues.

Some jobs offer more scope for creativity than others. Teaching is a more creative work than hiking because it requires more originality in perception and action. There are uncreative people. The genius and the average person seem to have little in common, yet the difference between them is that of quantity. In the genius, imagination, energy, and persistence might be more highly developed. The sane individuals are creative in diverse ways and different degrees.

Creativity calls for tenacity and patience since it must be sustained over long periods of time and in the face of formidable obstacles. Lying on his back on a scaffold, the Italian painter Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) took seven years to paint the Sistine Chapel in the papal

palace. “Paradise Lost” cost the English poet John Milton (1608-1674) his eyes.

The creative persons are skeptical of accepted ideas and assumptions. Their skepticism liberates them from conventional beliefs while their predilection for new ideas prepares them for the intellectual risks of creative discovery. The French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) threw open the flood-gates of modern philosophy, no less than those of modern science, by his method of putting everything in doubt.

Most of all, creativity implies non-conformity, because conformity inhabits the traits that hinder creativity. As a general rule, the conformists are less intelligent than the independent-minded persons, less flexible and less prolific in ideas. They are more dependent on others and less confident of themselves. Their personality is often rigid and authoritarian. They seek security and acceptance and shun innovation.

The independent-minded persons are capable of creative achievements because they maintain a balance between group-centeredness and self-centeredness. They are open to experience. The creative persons have a sense of mission, of destiny, and they are not megalomaniac!

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